

VZCZCXRO3928
OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #2751/01 2310149
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 190149Z AUG 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2848
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY 1226
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 0428
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 0095
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 0212
RUEHKU/AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY 0260
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 0177
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0624
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002751

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/18/2017

TAGS: [IR](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: GOI DIPLOMACY WITH JORDAN, SYRIA YIELDING PROGRESS

REF: BAGHDAD 2683

Classified By: POL-MIL COUNSELOR MARCIE B. RIES, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)
)

11. (S/NF) SUMMARY: PolMil Counselor met with DFM Labeed Abbawi August 16 to clarify details of the follow up to the Border Security Working Group held in Damascus August 8-9. PolMil Counselor also conveyed to Abbawi U.S. interest in holding trilateral talks with Syria and Iraq (reftel). Abbawi agreed to contact the SARG to arrange trilateral talks in Baghdad. Abbawi related his impressions of the shift in Syrian attitudes toward the GOI and the U.S. presence based on his conversations with Syrian officials, particularly DFM Faisal Mikdad, assessing that the SARG was willing to engage the U.S. but continued to see advantage in the U.S. being tied down, in Iraq. He had also been present for bilateral talks in Jordan, which had yielded agreements to exchange liaison officers, hold a future meeting of justice and immigration officials, and implement a system to issue visas to Iraqi travelers. The GOJ also agreed to promote Iraqi participation in the upcoming 6 2 meeting on security. While formally supportive of the GOI, Jordanian officials privately revealed their suspicions that the Maliki government was sectarian and overly influenced by Iran. END SUMMARY.

GOI BILATERAL MEETINGS WITH JORDAN

12. (S/REL AUS, CAN, GBR) DFM Abbawi eagerly discussed the outcome of the recently concluded bilateral meetings between the GOI and their Jordanian counterparts. The Iraqi delegation was led by National Security Advisor Rubaie and included defense, interior, and intelligence officials as well as himself. GOJ interlocutors included the Foreign Minister, chief of the intelligence services (Mukhabarat), the Interior Minister, and GOJ spokesperson. Abbawi related that, in a closed meeting, the Mukhabarat chief asserted that King Abdullah had directed his government to do whatever it could to assist Iraq. Concrete outcomes of the talks listed by Abbawi included an agreement to exchange liaison officers, a future meeting to include justice and immigration officials of both countries, and a commitment to resume the issuance of visas to Iraqis traveling to Jordan. Lastly, the GOJ agreed to support Iraqi participation in the upcoming 6 2 meeting on security. The GOI had made clear that it should be at the table at any discussion of Iraq by this group, a position the Jordanians eventually accepted, according to Abbawi.

13. (S/REL AUS, CAN, GBR) The two delegations also discussed detainees held by both countries, Iraqi refugees in Jordan, and other issues. The Jordanians appeared to be motivated by their vulnerability to terrorism, keenly felt due to their proximity to Hamas, Syria, and now potentially terrorists leaving Iraq. Abbawi related that the Jordanians saw themselves as a target due to their close relationship with the U.S. Overall, Abbawi believed that the GOJ was agreeable to a degree of direct bilateral cooperation with Iraq which the GOI had not experienced before. Abbawi reported that the Jordanians, while expressing full support for and a willingness to work with the Maliki government, privately expressed their discomfort with what they perceived as its sectarian nature. They seemed especially concerned about Iranian infiltration of the Iraqi MoI, and were worried about Iranian influence in general.

PROPOSED TRILATERAL U.S.-IRAQ-SYRIA TALKS

14. (S/NF) PolMil Counselor, referring to the informal Syrian proposal for a trilateral meeting with Iraq and the U.S. which Abbawi had relayed to U.S. observers at the Damascus Border Security Working Group (reftel), indicated that the U.S. was interested in pursuing such a meeting. She elaborated that the U.S. would like to see the trilateral focus exclusively on security in Iraq and take place at Abbawi's level or even experts, with delegations composed of diplomatic and security officials. Abbawi agreed that Baghdad would be the appropriate venue for such a trilateral and undertook to contact the SARG to begin making the necessary arrangements.

BAGHDAD 00002751 002 OF 002

15. (S/NF) Abbawi assessed that the SARG was willing to engage, but he said that DFM Faisal Mikdad, his principal interlocutor, had expressed dismay at statements by high-level U.S. officials, specifically one in which the U.S. named Syria as a source of concern in the region along with Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah. Mikdad related to Abbawi that the SARG had been forthcoming on several occasions, but felt that the U.S. had failed to recognize its efforts. Because of this, Mikdad had initially indicated to Abbawi that the U.S. should make a gesture, before the SARG would agree to talks. Mikdad mentioned the return of the U.S. Ambassador to Syria, Abbawi said, but he managed to convince Mikdad that any talks should take place without preconditions.

SARG ATTITUDE TOWARDS GOI SHIFTING

16. (S/ REL AUS, CAN, GBR) Abbawi further related that he had discussed U.S. involvement in Iraq with Mikdad, whom he described as a friend, a strong man with direct connections to President Bashar al-Asad, and possibly the next Foreign Minister, if rumors of an upcoming cabinet shuffle in Damascus were true. Based on his conversations with Mikdad, Abbawi assessed that the SARG's strategy regarding Iraq had shifted in the last year from one of seeking to undermine the GOI to one of seeking greater representation for Sunnis and in particular ex-Ba'athists in the Iraqi government. Abbawi said that he told Mikdad that these ex-Ba'athists were the same ones who had plotted against Syria when they were in power, and that if they came to power again they would do the same. That said, Abbawi thought that a line could be drawn between Ba'athist ex-military and ex-intelligence officials committed to violence and those who had been Ba'athists solely out of political expediency. Abbawi perceived that the SARG saw advantage for itself in having the U.S. tied down, in Iraq and that they did not want the U.S. to fail, but neither did they want to see the U.S. win. Regarding the wider regional situation, Abbawi said that both the Syrians and the

Jordanians feared that Israel could be provoked into military action; the Jordanians seeing Hezbollah, Iran, or Syria as the likely provocateurs. Abbawi confirmed that PM Maliki intended to visit Syria on August 20, and that he will accompany Maliki.

EXPERT-LEVEL TALKS: BSWG, IRAN-IRAQ BORDER

¶7. (C/REL AUS, CAN, GBR) Abbawi promised to contact Jordan and Kuwait in order to determine which country would host the expert-level meeting agreed to at the Damascus Border Security Working Group. Abbawi agreed that the U.S. should be present at the expert-level meeting.

¶8. (S/REL AUS, CAN, GBR) Abbawi confirmed that an Iraqi technical-level delegation was currently in Iran to negotiate the territorial sea boundary extending from the Shatt al-Arab. The delegation had departed on August 13. He promised that he would provide a contact from the delegation so that the U.S. could receive a readout from the negotiations.
CROCKER